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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed verbal responses of status unequals in situations where a linguistic mistake occurred. Subjects were 80 native Turkish-speaking university students (28 males, 52 females) who participated in role-playing exercises using such situations. Two aspects of the responses were investigated: the semantic and syntactic formulas that native speakers of Turkish use in these contexts, and the politeness devices used to soften the impact of a potentially face-threatening speech act. The latter were also compared with the devices preferred by native speakers of North American English and Japanese. The objective was to examine one aspect of the sociolinguistic competence of Turkish speakers and to reveal possible cross-cultural variations in politeness strategies. The politeness strategies examined, drawn from other research, are listed in an appendix. A list of references is also included. (MSE)

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*Corrections in Turkish: Sociolinguistic Analysis and Cross-Cultural Comparison*

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Abstract

This paper analyses verbal responses of status unequals in situations where a mistake occurred. Our aim is two-fold: Firstly, to reveal the semantic and syntactic formulas native speakers of Turkish use in situations where an interlocutor of unequal status makes a mistake. Secondly, to investigate the politeness devices Turks employ to soften the impact of a potentially face-threatening speech act, and to compare and contrast these with devices preferred by native speakers of American English and Japanese. In this way, we can learn who finds appropriate to say what to whom in this particular speech situation, thus revealing part of the sociolinguistic competence of native speakers of Turkish as well as uncovering possible cross-cultural variations in politeness strategies. Such findings can help second/foreign language teachers in equipping their students with tools of sociolinguistic competence, besides aiding to overcome communication breakdowns in cross-cultural encounters.

Key words: Turkish, American English, Japanese, speech acts, correction, cross-cultural communication, politeness

## Introduction

The study of miscellaneous speech acts have been showing up in the applied linguistics and pragmatics literature with regularity since the mid 70s. Analysis of the semantic and syntactic composition of speech acts, as the minimal units of interaction, and the sociocultural conditions under which their use is appropriate are important in several aspects: in revealing the norms of interaction and interpretation as well as the values of a society, in helping the applied linguists design socioculturally and grammatically authentic and appropriate materials for the teachers and learners of a language, and in general showing how we use language and its nuances to do things with words. In this way we get insights about native speakers' communicative competence (Hymes 1971) and via the study of speech acts, which are generally culturally conditioned, we can make cross-cultural comparisons of language use in order to reveal possible cases of communication breakdowns and find out their underlying reasons.

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Results of speech act studies on apologies, compliments, invitations, expressions of gratitude, among others, have shown that in many cases native speaker intuitions about how we use language are incorrect and in many cases the cultural stereotypes we have formed are misleading. Such findings are invaluable for both the theoretical and the applied linguist and have led them towards doing empirical research on language use in its sociocultural context rather than basing their analysis of language and language use on intuitions.

One of the most important outcomes of speech act studies was the finding that many speech acts in American English are realized in a highly patterned fashion, almost to the point of being formulaic, contrary to many Americans' perception of themselves as verbally creative and non conservative. Speech act studies based on data collected in natural and laboratory settings reveal the formulaic nature of their verbal patterns as in the expression of gratitude (Eisenstein and Bodman 1986), compliments (Daikuhara 1986; Manes and Wolfson 1983; Wolfson 1978, 1983), apologies (Olshtain and Cohen 1981, 1983; Owen 1980). The *image of the 'polite'* and 'indirect' Japanese are defeated, on the other hand, by data showing that native speakers of American English use more indirect speech and politeness markers in face-threatening acts such as correction (Takahashi and Beebe 1993).

Speech acts studies of the cross-cultural type as done by Olshtain and Cohen (1983, 1987), Olshtain and Weinbach (1986), Takahashi and Beebe (1993) among others, reveal cross-cultural variation in linguistic behavior which might create intercultural communication problems, or "pragmatic failure" in Thomas's (1983) words, which also confronts second/foreign language learners. Such studies can provide empirical data in combating stereotypes which can cause serious impediments and misinterpretation in interlingual communication.

Research on speech acts has shown two lines of development; face-threatening and non face-threatening acts as executed by native speakers of diverse cultures such as Americans, Israelis, Japanese, etc.[1] In this study we are choosing to focus on the potentially face-threatening speech act of correction as used by native

speakers of Turkish to interlocutors of higher and lower status than themselves, because of our perception that face-threatening speech acts are more prone to misunderstandings and can lead to more serious communication problems and also due to the important role of corrections in classroom teaching.

The research questions we are concerned with are;

1) How are corrections provided by Turks, that is to say, what kind of correction formulas are used ?

2) What type of politeness markers do native speakers of Turkish utilize, if any, to soften this potentially face-threatening act ?, and

3) What are the similarities and differences among the ways in which native speakers of American English, Japanese, and Turkish soften their corrections to status unequals ?

The strategies used in correcting status unequals reveal the ways in which Turks deal with potentially face-threatening situations, besides showing learners of the Turkish language how to interact in a manner appropriate in the Turkish culture, especially in their interactions with their teachers in the classroom. Such sociolinguistic knowledge can be especially useful for non-Turkish students receiving formal training in Turkey as well as for the great number of expatriate teachers teaching miscellaneous courses in this country. Knowledge of socioculturally appropriate norms of interaction in classroom corrections can give teachers and learners crucial tools in maintaining classroom interaction and in preventing their being misunderstood by the classroom speech community.

Additionally, doing a cross-cultural study of these strategies will assist Turkish teachers of English in raising their students' language awareness about the similarities and differences between the way Americans and Turkish people give corrections. Knowing how much and in what way they deviate from the cultural norms of the target language will prevent them from making irreparable mistakes, thus easing intercultural communication and making it as effective as possible in a world which is in incessant communication in many domains.

**Method**

Eighty first-year university students, 28 males and 52 females, aged between 19-22, from two large universities in Turkey participated in this study. All students had passed the centralized, two tier university entrance examination and were now in the first year of a four year program in teacher training, preparing to be teachers of English as a foreign language. They were all native speakers of Turkish, representing people from urban and rural backgrounds and from various socioeconomic groups. Thus, the subjects formed a group quite representative of young educated Turkish people who can be found in all areas of Turkey.

Data was collected via written discourse completion tests and analyzed through descriptive statistics as part of a larger study where we looked at the execution of various speech acts by the Turks. We have adapted the situations used by Takahashi and Beebe (1993) in their studies with native speakers of American English, Japanese, and Japanese ESL speakers[2] for the sake of obtaining a basis for cross-cultural comparisons. These were translated into Turkish by the researchers and by an independent Turkish-English balanced bilingual. They were further validated by two professors of Turkish and English Linguistics who did a comparative linguistic analysis. The final translations were based on the combination of the above procedures.

The situations used by Takahashi and Beebe had cross-cultural validity due to the fact that they were not specific to the American culture, consisting of general everyday encounters as ascertained by other Turkish people. Thus, no syntactic or semantic changes were made. As part of the larger research project subjects responded to the following situations by writing what they would say in these situations. The situations were given along with the others in no particular order.

Situation 1: Higher to Lower

"You are a professor in a history course. During class discussion, one of your students gives an account of a famous historical event with the wrong date."

Situation 2: Lower to Higher

"You are a student in a sociology class. During lecture, the professor quotes a famous statement attributing it to the wrong scholar."

Along with the discourse completion tests, a one-page questionnaire eliciting background information on the students, such as their age, gender, family background and socioeconomic status, extent of exposure to English, and so on were administered by the researchers at the two universities.

## Findings

The responses were analyzed according to their functions and their semantic and syntactic compositions. The categories given below emerged from the analysis of the data which was summarized via descriptive statistics. Table 1 and the following definitions of categories and examples show the findings on the semantic and syntactic formulas used by native speakers of Turkish in responding to the mistakes of people of unequal status.

**Table 1:** Responses to the mistake of the unequal status person.

| | Correction | No Correction[1] | Other[2] | No Response | Ambiguous | Dis-qualified | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Higher - Lower | 35<br>43.8% | 33<br>41.3% | 3<br>3.8% | - | 2<br>2.5% | 7<br>8.8% | 80 |
| Lower - Higher | 53<br>66.3% | 9<br>11.3% | 3<br>3.8% | 3<br>3.8% | 2<br>2.5% | 10<br>12.5% | 80 |

*Notes to the table*:

The percentages have been rounded off to the nearest tenth.

1. 'No correction' category refers to cases where the subjects just pointed out the occurrence of a mistake but offered no immediate correction of the other person.

2. Other: category 3 below.

## Correction Formulas

Higher to Lower

1. Correction (35 responses). In these instances the professor provided the correct answer after the student's mistake, generally in the form of a statement

"The date you gave is not ... but ..."

"The date you gave is wrong. (  ) was signed on ....."

"It seems that there's a small mistake with the date. The actual date is ..."

2. Pointing out mistake, with no correction (33 responses): Here the professor simply drew the student(s) attention to the fact that a mistake was made, but provided no correction. Several formats were used;

a) pointing out the mistake explicitly via statement (2 responses)

"What you're saying is correct, but you've made a mistake with the date."

b) giving student another chance while pointing out the mistake (11 responses)

"That's not the date. I give you 5 minutes to search for the answer."

c) pointing out the mistake via a question and giving student another chance to answer (4 responses)

"Be careful. Was it that date ? Come on, think once again."

"Are you sure of the date you gave ? I think you should think again."

d) pointing out the mistake implicitly (8 responses): Within this category instead of saying explicitly that a mistake occurred, the professor indicated it in a covert way as can be seen from the examples below:

"I suggest you learn such important dates well."

"It's not vitally important to memorize dates. Don't worry."

"Study again."

e) pointing out the mistake and asking another student for the correct response (3 responses):

"You said the date wrong. Is there anyone who knows the correct one?"

f) giving advice or warning while pointing out the mistake (4 responses):

"You said the wrong date, but you need to learn it."

g) giving rationale for mistake occurring (1 response):

"Let's correct that date... You might have made a mistake due to your excitement."

3. Other (3 responses)

"Look, these things happened before that event (professor gives a list of events)

"Really ? How interesting!"

4. Ambiguous response (2 responses): These were responses which did not seem to relate or make sense within the context given, thus were not counted in the analysis.

5. Disqualified (7 responses): Those responses in which the students described what they would do rather than writing their exact verbal response to the situation were not counted.

Lower to Higher

1. Correction given

a) in statement form (28 responses)

"Sir, I think those words belong to ...."

"I thought it was ... who said these words."

"That's the wrong person. The correct person is ..."

b) as a negative yes/no question (16 responses)

"Wasn't it ... saying these words ?"

"Sir, didn't these words belong to ... ?"

c) as a statement, followed by a confirmation question (5 responses)

"Sir , I think ... said these. Am I wrong ?"

d) as a choice question (1 response)

"Were these ...'s or ...'s words sir ?"

e) as a negative yes/no question followed by a confirmation question (3 responses)

"Sir, weren't these ...'s words, or am I mistaken again ?"

2. pointing out mistake, with no correction

a) via statement (5 responses)

"Sir, you said the wrong answer."

"Excuse me, sir. In the light of information you have given us, those are not ...'s words."

b) as a negative yes/no question (2 responses)

"Didn't those words belong to someone else ?"

c) implicitly (2 responses)

"I think that person took those from someone else."

"Sir, didn't ... have a saying similar to this ?"

3. Opting out/silence (3 responses): Here the students said that they would refrain from saying anything upon noticing the professor's mistake.

4. Other (3 responses)

"This can be discussed."

"An expert should not make a mistake like this."

5. Ambiguous response (2 responses)

6. Disqualified

**Discussion**

In the applied linguistics literature on classroom discourse, error correction has received considerable emphasis, with focus usually being on language teaching. Chaudron says that "Aside from general instruction, the primary role of language teachers is often considered to be the provision of both error correction, a form of negative feedback, and positive sanctions or approval of learners' production." (1988:132) He explains that the giving of feedback in classrooms (i.e., the final step in the classic exchange cycle of teacher initiation/solicitation, student response and teacher feedback/evaluation) is different from the exchanges outside of the teaching situation. In the latter case, corrections of others are done discreetly, with deference, since there is a strong preference to allow speakers correct themselves (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977).

Review of relevant literature indicates that teachers have a variety of discourse acts at their disposal to use in providing negative and positive feedback, such as confirmation checks, clarification requests, repetition, models, explanation, etc. (Chaudron 1988:144). To this list, Allwright (1975: 104) adds the following: Fact of error indicated, blame indicated, location indicated, model provided, error

type indicated, remedy indicated, improvement indicated, praise indicated, opportunity for new attempt given.

Results of our study show that although the above feedback types were given for language classes, some are also utilized in content classes such as the history class here, therefore having cross content-class applicability. The tri-partite classroom interaction pattern also seems to hold for different types of classes. Both the professor and the students in our study used a range of the above feedback strategies, with only 3 students opting out to give no feedback. Professors used feedback in all cases, though they did not correct the student's mistake immediately. Contrary to what one might have expected based on the common perception that it is the teachers' responsibility to correct mistakes, and Takahashi and Beebe's (1993) finding that almost all of their subjects corrected the other person, the cases of correction vs. no correction in our data were quite equivalent (35 vs. 33 subjects respectively). Thus, in Turkish classrooms providing no immediate correction is as appropriate as giving *correction right after an error occurs* and this *is a frequently* practiced strategy.

In 15 out of 33 cases of no correction (categories 2b and 2c) the teacher gave the students time or another opportunity for a new attempt which might mean that they were going to provide correction after giving the students a chance for self-correction. Such behavior are fruitful acts in the classroom in terms of getting the students rethink their response and possibly self-correct and we were glad to discover that these teacher trainees whom we used in our study found such behavior appropriate.

All but one ("Let's correct that date. Shouldn't it be ... than ... ?") of teacher corrections were given in the form of a statement. In cases where only the fact of a mistake was indicated, 26 responses were in statement form and 7 were in question form. All in all, there was not much questioning from the teacher to the students contrary to what Takahashi and Beebe (1993:148) say, such that the use of a question to elicit a self-correction is fairly frequent from a teacher to a student in

the classroom. Moreover, the question pattern "Isn't it X who said Y?" which the above researchers found to be dominant for both the Japanese and American subjects was used only once by the Turkish professor, being preferred instead by the students. Our findings imply that before making generalizations about the appropriacy of certain formulas across cultures, data should be obtained from a substantial number of diverse cultures.

An interesting finding which perhaps counters widespread expectations, was that the vast majority of the students corrected the professor's mistake; 28 in question form and 20 in statement form, while 5 consisted of a correction in statement form followed by a confirmation question where the subjects tried to get a confirmation from the teacher about the correction they have just offered, as in "Sir, wasn't it ... saying these, or am I wrong ?" Altogether 28/62 (45 %) student feedback to the teacher's mistake was in the form of yes/no or confirmation questions, (corroborating Takahashi and Beebe's above-mentioned finding for the students), as opposed to the professor's use of questions 8/68 (11.8 %) of the time.

A possible explanation for the fact that teachers use the more direct statement forms to give corrective feedback-as opposed to the yes/no question format preferred by the students in correcting the professor-can be the role relationships and expectations of the teacher in the Turkish classrooms. Teacher corrections of students are culturally expected thus are not perceived by either party to be face-threatening, hence they are given in a straightforward manner. When it is the lower status students correcting the teacher's mistake, less direct and nonimposing forms of corrective feedback seem more appropriate to the situation and the role relationships in the classroom.

To sum up the study findings we can say that in the Turkish culture higher status professors preferred more direct feedback uttered in the form of statements in correcting the students or in indicating that a mistake was made. Many also preferred to give students another chance to come up with the correct answer. The lower status students, on the other hand, opted out for the more indirect questioning

patters in offering corrections to the professor. Turkish students were not intimidated in their verbal behavior, shown by the fact that only about 4 % opted out of saying anything (as opposed to 40 % of the Japanese native speakers and 13 % of Americans in Takahashi and Beebe's study). The Turkish students who opted out said:

"I would not interfere. I would think of the correct answer,"

"I would not say anything," and

"I would not feel like warning. I would keep silent because I know the correct answer. If the other students know the correct answer, there is no problem. Not to embarrass the professor, I may ask it during the break." Therefore, despite certain perceptions of the Turkish culture as being traditional with quite strict culturally defined role relationships, new generations of teachers and students in modern Turkey teach and learn in more liberal classrooms where there is freedom of expression.

**Politeness formulas in Turkish corrections and their cross-cultural comparison**

The analysis of linguistic behavior in face-threatening acts such as correction, disagreement, refusal, announcing embarrassing information, chastisement, and the like, are important areas of inquiry because they can be sources of cross-cultural miscommunications, that is to say, pragmatic failure (Thomas 1983) as aforementioned. Although misunderstanding and misuse of many speech acts, i.e., invitations, compliments, praise, etc., which are also culturally conditioned, may also lead to mis-communications, it seems that failure to realize fully those acts which threaten the face of the interlocutors can cause more grave offenses and thus, quite irreparable communication breakdowns.

In studying a sample of face-threatening acts, Beebe and Takahashi (1989a, b), Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990), Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Takahashi and Beebe (1993), among others, have found that several semantic formulas such as positive remarks, "I wish I could, [but], ... ", praise and

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compliments " It's very nice, [but], .... ", and positive evaluations "You have done a good job on this, [but],... ", and other softening devices are used as politeness formulas to preface the upcoming face-threatening act. Via such prefaces, the communication situation was made less face-threatening and the flow of interaction was much smoother.

In their comparative study of corrections used by native speakers of American English, Japanese ESL speakers, and Japanese communicating in their mother tongues, Takahashi and Beebe (1993) showed how native speakers of Japanese and American English used the following politeness formulas, in different extents, to soften the impact of face-threatening acts;

(a) positive remarks or "positive adjuncts" such as "I'd love to, [but]... ", "That sounds wonderful, [but] ... ." Similarly, expressions of "token agreements" (Brown and Levinson 1978) such as "I agree with you, [but] ... ", "Yes, [but]... " were used in prefacing disagreements to status unequals (Beebe and Takahashi (1989a, b).

(b) "softeners" -- i.e., expressions (or hedges) such as "I believe," "I think," "You may have (the wrong date)";

(c) questions such as "Did you say ... ?" "When did that happen ?"; and

(d) other expressions intended to lighten the gravity of the interlocutor's mistake or to defend the interlocutor, e.g., "You made one small error in the date."

In this part of our study we would like to look at the softening devices and other politeness formulas that native speakers of Turkish used in responding to the mistakes of status unequals. In the analysis of our data we considered the above categories of politeness markers as our starting point, for the sake of cross-cultural comparisons. We found the politeness formulas used by the Turkish subjects easily categorizable in the above framework, showing their degree of universality at least for the cultures compared.

**Table 2:** The use of politeness formulas by native speakers of Turkish in making corrections of status unequals in their mother tongue

| | Positive Remark | Softeners | Questions | Mitigating Devices | Other[1] | Direct[2] Response | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Higher - Lower | 5<br>7% | 14<br>19.7% | 5<br>7% | 4<br>5.6% | 1<br>1.4% | 42<br>59.2% | 71 |
| Lower - Higher | 1<br>1.5% | 27<br>41.5% | 24<br>36.9% | | | 13<br>20% | 65 |

*Notes to the table*:

1. The 'other' category contains the response " I have to explain this event to you in a more clear manner.", where the professor seemed to take responsibility to remedy the mistake, which was categorized as being polite, though were not found to be categorizable within the framework above.
2. 'Direct response' refers to those responses which did not contain any politeness or softening device.

As can be seen from Table 2, there were not many cases or varieties of politeness devices used by the higher status professor in correcting or pointing out the mistake of the lower status student. Altogether, 40.8% of responses given by the higher status person included some device to soften the face-threatening act, while 59.2% was direct (cf. 26 % direct responses given by the Japanese in the same situation). The reasons that can be given for this finding is the higher status of the professors and especially the classroom situation in which corrections are supposed to be among a teacher's responsibility thus requiring no softening politeness device. In the instances where professors softened their feedback to the students they used parenthetical softeners as shown in the following examples:

"Let's definitely correct that date so that your friends would not learn incorrect things. You might have made a mistake due to your excitement."

"I think you should think again."

"It seems that there's a small mistake with the date. The actual date is ... "

"I'm sorry, but you probably did not study these dates. Study again tonight."

Only five subjects used positive remarks as follows, showing that Turkish teachers did not perceive the need to soften their corrections of their students with positive prefaces:

"What you are saying is correct, but you've made a mistake with the date."

"It's good for you to know the historical event, but you said the date wrong. It was ...."

"Yes, the development of the event is as you say, however, it was on ...."

"That's incorrect. I want you to think of the answer again. I'm sure you know the correct answer."

"That's not the date, but if you think again, I'm sure you'll find the date." (The latter two examples were counted as positive remarks because they expressed confidence in the student to come up with the correct response.)

These findings also indicate that positive prefaces do not constitute a commonly used strategy for the Turks, at least in this speech act situation.

In their research Takahashi and Beebe (1993) found the extent of use of positive prefaces by the higher status Americans communicating in English to the lower status ones to be 79%, while the Japanese communicating in Japanese used them 13 % of the time. As a result of their comparison, these researchers claim that the use of positive prefaces by the higher status person to the lower status one is a distinctly American phenomenon. This claim is supported by our findings as well, with even fewer Turkish subjects (7%) using it.

Turkish respondents used softeners, mitigating remarks, and questions as politness devices in addressing the lower status person 32% of the time, displaying sociolinguistic behavior similar to the Japanese than the Americans, who used such devices at the rate of 26% and 71% respectively. This finding shows that Turks are not as politeness conscious as the Americans, while also not taking it for granted that as the higher status person they have the right to give direct and potentially face-threatening feedback.

In cases where a lower status student corrected a higher status professor, the use of softening or politeness devices doubled to 80%. In general, politeness devices used were intersentential softeners and corrections offered in yes/no question form,

the latter usually acting as a device seeking for confirmation from the teacher of the correction offered. Examples are:

" I think it was ... instead of ... who said that. Am I wrong ?"

"Sir, excuse me, but to my knowledge, these words are ...'s."

"Possibly there's a mistake. Wasn't the correct answer ... ?"

"Sir, are you sure that the person you mentioned was the one saying these words ?"

One interesting finding was the frequent use of negative yes/no confirmation questions to make the correction and to point out the occurrence of a mistake as in:

"Sir, wasn't it ... who said that ?"

"Sir, was it really ... who said that ? But, we knew it as ... "

"Sir, I think ... instead of ... said that. Am I wrong ?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but, as far as I know, these are ...'s words. What do you say ?"[3]

Indeed, as mentioned before, about 45 % of student feedback to professor's mistake were in the form of yes/no questions, asking for confirmation of what the professor just said (in this case the wrong person). In a few cases, the students were asking for confirmation of the correction they offered to their professor or asking the professor to confirm his/her own words. It seems that asking for confirmation of the higher status person's words is used here as a politeness device instead of giving a direct statement. One possible function of providing negative feedback in the form of a negative yes/no question used as a confirmation device might be to point out to the higher status person that he/she has made a mistake, without making it a face-threatening act, and then giving the speaker a chance to self-correct in order to save face in front of the others. Indeed, as explained by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983:110n), negative yes/no question are used for seeking agreement without imposition on the hearer as well as carrying the function of expressing surprise for receiving information that goes counter to one's expectations. This can also be an explanation for 80% of the Japanese subjects' use

of question forms to soften their corrections of the other (Takahashi and Beebe 1993).

Another finding was the use of polite address term *hocam* 'Sir/Madam/Miss'[4] to start one's utterances to the higher status person. Accepting this form of address as a "very salient indicator of status relationships" (Wolfson 1989), we analyzed them by looking at the frequency with which they were used. 38/65 of the responses (58.5%) contained this address term, whereas there were only three instances (4.3%) of an address term used by the professor to the student, *evladım* 'my child', which signifies closeness in terms of social and psychological distance in the Turkish culture. However, one needs to mention here that *evladım* is quite informal and used by the elders to younger children, thus it is probably not regarded as an appropriate address term to university students. The improper use of this term may show the professor's disappointment about the incorrect response and even carries a tone of warning, that is, conveying the message that such mistakes will not be tolerated, if they happen the next time.

A comparison of the use of various politeness markers as used by native speakers of American English, Japanese, and Turkish show that people of different cultures deal with the same situation in different ways. Positive prefaces given by the higher status to the lower status person seem integral to American corrections, not used much by the Turks or the Japanese; AE (79%) > JJ (13%) > TT (7%)[5]. As shown by the data, the use of positive prefaces by the lower status person to the higher status one was not found appropriate in the three cultures compared as it is an evaluative remark, hence not appropriate from a student to a professor in the classroom. Only one Turkish student used such a semantic formula, "Sir, what you said is very good and relevant to the issue, but I think ... said these words." which sounds odd and socially inappropriate.

The lack of use of such positive remarks from the lower to the higher status person in all groups indicates that it was judged totally inappropriate by Americans, Turks and the Japanese to praise the professor and then correct his/her mistake.

Indeed, "the positive remark often used in corrections is praise of the interlocutor, and such praise usually come from the 'superior', not from the lower-status person to the higher-status" (Takahashi and Beebe 1993: 151).

As shown clearly by Takahashi and Beebe's (1993) work, both Americans and Japanese style shift in accordance with a shift in the interlocutor's status and use a considerably greater number of politeness devices to those higher status than themselves. This style shifting phenomenon was also evident in the Turkish data, as explained before, where the subjects displayed different verbal responses to those higher and lower status than themselves, as indicated by the correction formulas they used and the politeness devices they preferred.

In the position of a lower person correcting a higher one the Japanese used the greatest number of politeness markers made up of softeners, questions and mitigating devices. Americans and Turks both increased their use of such remarks to higher status interlocutors, though still lagging behind the Japanese who displayed the greatest style shift; (JJ (133%) > AE(100%) > TT(78%). This might be a result of social status as a linguistic variable carrying more weight in the Japanese culture.

As a higher status person correcting a lower status one, the Americans were the most careful about the face of the other person, using softening markers such as mitigating devices, questions, considerably more frequently than the Japanese and the Turks, AE(71%) > TT(32%) > JJ(26%).

One interesting finding was the cross-culturally different use of avoidance or "opting out" (Bonikowska 1988) as a response category and its possible implications about role relationships influencing linguistic behavior. Among the Japanese in Takahashi and Beebe's study 40% opted out of saying anything to the professor about his/her mistake. This number was 13% for the Americans, and only about 4% for the Turks. These numbers show that such a strategy which can be seen as part of politeness, that is, one's desire not to make the other lose face, was more acceptable for the Japanese than it was for the Turks and the Americans. This can possibly be a

result of Japanese sociocultural values which we are not going to discuss here. In language teaching though, such a strategy is not really considered as an option for the learner. However, if opting out of saying something is part of acceptable sociolinguistic behavior in a culture, then maybe it should be recognized as such, without, of course, conveying the message to learners of that language that avoidance is a good strategy to use in all instances, as this defeats our purpose of giving our students fluency and spontaneity in the target language.

To further analyze the politeness devices used by native speakers of Turkish in correction, we have also adapted the framework from Brown and Levinson's (1987) work on politeness which is applied here as declaration through speech and the devices used in communication, of respect for another's face, that is to say, his/her positive public self-image.[6] (see Appendix A)

In terms of Brown and Levinson's strategies of positive politeness (i.e., the speakers emphasize solidarity with each other) and negative politeness (i.e., the speakers show their deference by minimizing impositions on the hearer), the politeness markers preferred by native speakers of Turkish were as follows: When the higher status interlocutors used politeness devices they consisted of one or a combination of the negative politeness strategies of a) using parenthetical verbs/adverbs as softening devices, most choosing to say "I think it is..." rather than the more direct "It is ..."; b) using disclaimers or what we have named as positive prefaces above; and c) to a less extent, the positive politeness strategy of using questions as devices seeking agreement and neutralizing the effect of one's correction.

This last strategy of using questions such as "Didn't these words belong to ... ?", "Sir, aren't these ...'s words ?", to seek agreement was the most common among the lower status students. These were followed by the negative politeness strategies of using parenthetical verbs or adverbs as mitigating devices, "Sir, I think there's a mistake. As far as I know ... said those words.", and the positive politeness strategy of apologizing and using disclaimers , "If I am not mistaken sir, these words belong to ... ."

The difference in the extent and choice of politeness devices preferred by the Turkish subjects again shows the non-reciprocal nature of language use: Lower status people used one or more of Brown and Levinson's politeness devices 70.8 % of the time in addressing a higher status person, while the higher status people used such devices in 32.4% of their utterances to lower status people.

Therefore, in summing up the research findings, we can say that depending on the relative status of the hearer the corrections offered varied between direct statements and more indirect questions in terms of their explicitness. Higher status professors provided more direct corrections containing fewer politeness devices, while the lower status students used twice as many politeness markers, such as using a questioning strategy, to make their corrections of the higher status person less direct and more polite.

The above findings can be accounted for by considering the correction situation and the role relationships of the interlocutors. In a classroom teaching situation the professor's task is to convey accurate information and to give and receive feedback from the students. The students' task is to listen and respond. Based on this division of labor in the classroom, it seems natural that teachers are more direct in providing negative and positive feedback because of their role and status. Students, on the other hand, utilize more indirect strategies in giving corrective feedback to the professor probably due to their perceptions that it is the teacher's pedagogic role to provide students with corrections and not vice versa.

When we consider Turkish cultural norms, such as the showing of respect to people of greater age and status than one's own, high regards for professors, and the positive connotations of being non-challenging in one's encounters, especially in a teaching-learning situation, the above findings can be seen as valid indicators of Turkish cultural norms as reflected in classroom interactions.

**Conclusions and implications**

In this study we have focused on the corrections formulas native speakers of Turkish use to status unequals. We have uncovered the semantic and syntactic forms they prefer, showing how style shifting occurred as a result of the role relationships and the status of the interlocutor. Special attention was given to the politeness strategies Turks used to soften the face-threatening nature of their corrections. These were then compared with the sociolinguistic behavior of Americans and Japanese in the same situation.

We have revealed certain similarities and differences in the sociolinguistic behavior of the three groups compared, which is a reflection of their cultural norms. Such findings are important in materials preparation for language learners and for preventing miscommunication in cross-cultural encounters. They give us empirical data that we can use to prepare interlocutors for giving appropriate feedback in speech situations.

Among the important findings of our study is information gathered on the ways in which Turks find it appropriate to give corrections. We have shown that positive prefaces as frequent parts of semantic formulas used by the Americans do not constitute an important part in the verbal repertoire of the Turks and that after comparing our finding with the Japanese data, we have shown that the Japanese are similar to the Turks in this respect. Other politeness markers such as softeners, mitigating remarks and especially question forms are used widely by the Turks as well as by the Japanese.

As in most other cultures we have found the Turks to display style variation to accommodate the characteristics of the interlocutor. The higher status Turks were found to be more polite than the Japanese in correcting lower status ones, though not as polite as the Americans. Turkish teachers corrected their students' mistake in about as many situations as they just pointed out the fact of an error, indicating that among Turkish professors getting the students self correct or having peer corrections were perceived to be as appropriate in the classroom as immediate

teacher correction. Their responses were more direct than the Americans' responses, indicating that Turkish teachers probably feel it their responsibility in the classroom to provide error correction or point out errors, without thinking that this was threatening to the students. The findings that Americans and Japanese provide more immediate corrections and that the Japanese were even more direct than the Turks in responding to student errors are reflections of differences in culturally appropriate classroom behavior.

Lower status Turks did not prefer the avoidance strategy when a person of higher status made a mistake, whereas this was a common occurrence among the Japanese. This finding shows that Turkish students are not intimidated in their classroom interactions and feel it appropriate to correct their professor's mistake, albeit in a polite and non-threatening manner.

Findings like the ones listed above show cross-cultural similarities and differences and can be utilized in equipping language learners and teachers with tools of sociolinguistic competence besides helping in dealing with cultural stereotypes. Learners of American English, Japanese, and Turkish as well as expatriate teachers can benefit from such research findings in adapting themselves better to the situation they are in and in making their evaluations of the others in a culturally appropriate framework.

Findings based on cross-cultural comparison are also invaluable to those people whose profession is translation (i.e., text or simultaneous translation) or who are involved in international transactions. In the domain of international communication and translations such data provide them with useful information in their goal of achieving both linguistically and sociolinguistically target-like language use.

In generalizing the findings to all situations where someone of unequal status makes a mistake, however, we need to exercise some caution. Though our observations of corrections in situations outside of the classroom show that Turks use quite the same syntactic and semantic patterns in giving feedback to the other

person, there can still be differences in the politeness markers used. In a classroom situation corrections from the teacher are expected as part of the tri-partite classroom sequence as mentioned above. Their being an integral component of such interaction can make classroom corrections less face-threatening than corrections given in a situation where role relationships and expectations are different. To find the answer to this questions, it seems a good idea to look at corrections among status unequals outside of the classroom to see the weight of the teaching situation as a determining factor for one's linguistic responses.

The data of our study come from young educated Turks from two different universities which are located in different parts of Turkey (one having students from rural while the other from urban backgrounds) and from various socioeconomic groups. However, although the subjects formed a group quite representative of young educated Turkish people whom we can run across in every part of Turkey, they do not constitute or represent the whole Turkish society. Consequently, we refrain from generalizing the findings of this study to all age groups. It would be interesting to investigate the similarities and differences in the way older Turks and younger ones would correct their status unequals. It is our supposition that the young generation's responses would be quite divergent from the older generations due to recent fast changes in the dynamics of the Turkish society.

In making comparisons of speech act use by various cultures, the limitations of cross-cultural studies of the type mentioned in this paper need to be kept in mind as well. In pointing out the inherent dangers in the cross-cultural study of speech acts, Wierzbicka (1985) raises the important question as to how we can be absolutely sure that speech acts such as apologies, chastisement, giving embarrassing information, etc., mean the same to the cultures compared. This is a valid question which all cross-cultural research needs to address. And it is too complex an issue to do justice as part of this paper (see also Wolfson, Marmor, & Jones 1989). Though corrections, especially classroom corrections as used in this study are more clearly defined speech acts than chastisement and so on, we still need

to consider the fact that they might carry different weight and meaning in diverse cultures.

Tools of data collection should also be considered in making generalizations. DCTs have been used to collect the data for the three groups discussed above. Although there have been debates on the advantages and disadvantages of discourse completion tests (Beebe 1985; Wolfson 1989), such as their degree of representation of naturally occurring speech, they are still widely used data collection procedures in speech act research, as they provide a control of the specific variables of the situation and allow easy access to a large number of data in a short period of time. However, we need to admit that written responses are very different in nature than spoken ones. The latter are more spontaneous and consist of performance variables such as hesitations, pauses, backtracking, and the like. Consequently, we propose that further studies on corrections by native speakers of Turkish include both DCTs and observations where Turkish people are examined in the process of correcting their *status* unequals.

*Notes:*

1. In the literature there has been some debates about the division of speech acts into face-threatening and non-face threatening. As Beebe (1989a:121n) attests, "It is ... quite problematic to determine which speech acts are face-threatening as well as whose face (the speaker's or hearer's) is being threatened". Though we support the above concern and feel that caution needs to be exercised in making such categorizations, we believe that there is inherent danger in the acts of correcting or pointing out someone's wrongdoing in terms of causing them lose face. Thus, we feel justified in categorizing corrections as face-threatening speech acts, as indeed done by many other scholars in the field.

2. Since Turkish ESL/EFL learners do not form a part of our research, Takahashi and Beebe's (1993) findings on Japanese ESL speakers were excluded from the discussion.

3. The second person 'you' used in all the lower status to higher status utterances was the second person plural (polite) 'you' *siz* that is used to status unequals and to people one is not socially or psychologically close with. In the higher to lower status utterances, the 'you' used was the second person singular (informal) *sen* that is used to family and friends. (cf. *vous* vs. *tu* in French)

4. *Hocam* in Turkish means 'my teacher/professor' without indicating the gender of the addressee.

5. AE: Native speakers of American English communicating in English, JJ: native speakers of Japanese;communicating in Japanese; TT: native speakers of Turkish communicating in Turkish.

6. We have, however, selected to use Takahashi and Beebe's framework because of extensive overlaps across categories in Brown and Levinson's list as well as due to the fact that the subjects in this study made use of several of the latter's strategies within one utterance, which made the data statistically difficult to tabulate. Besides, Takahashi and Beebe's four categories served our purposes of cross cultural comparison better.

**Appendix A:**

Strategies used in expressing positive and negative politeness. (adapted from Brown, P. and Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)

*Positive Politeness:* emphasize solidarity and rapport between speaker and listener.

1. noticing or attending to listener's wants, interests, needs via strategies such as using first names, giving compliments, asking about the other's well being, asking if help is needed, greetings, etc.
2. expressing approval and sympathy with the listener
3. including the listener by using 'we' and 'let's'
4. making small talk and using openings and closings
5. being agreeable by using back channel behavior and/or repetition of the listener's utterances.
6. seeking agreement by using question tags, etc., as a way of neutralizing assertions about intentions, motivation, and responsibility.

*Negative politeness:* minimize imposition on the listener, show deference.

1. being indirect via using embedded imperatives as in 'Can you pass the salt ?'
2. being pessimistic and saying things like 'I don't suppose you can lend me some money.'
3. minimizing the size of imposition by using diminutives, as in 'Can I see you for a second' or 'There was a small mistake there.'
4. apologizing and using disclaimers

   'Please forgive /excuse me for calling so late.'

   'That is good, but, ..... (+ claim, criticism, announcement)

   'If I am not mistaken ... (+ claim, criticism, announcement)

   'If you don't mind .... (+ directive)

5. using parenthetical verbs/adverbs as softening, mitigating devices

   'This is the right answer, I guess.'

   'We can, I think, reconsider this proposal.'

'presumably', 'possibly', 'unfortunately'

6. using distance markers as in using 'we' as in contrast to 'you'

7. reducing the immediacy of the imposition by using the agentless passive voice or appealing to authority

'Your application has been rejected.'

'All students are required by the school regulations to take compulsory history lessons.'

8. using hedges as 'kind of', 'sort of', etc., to minimize the impact of words

9. being speculative as in 'I wonder if ..... (+ directive)

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